

Journey: The Places We Will Go
 6.4.17
 Pentecost: Year A
 Worship in the Park
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 Text: Acts 2: 1-21

Today is the birthday of the church. And how do we celebrate birthdays?

With cake, candles, gifts, and a party! So, it seems fitting on Pentecost that we are having a picnic sort of like a party after worship and that everyone was asked to wear red which is the color of fire (like the candles on a cake and the little flames on the people's heads in today's Biblical story).

On Pentecost, it was reported that people received the gift of the Holy Spirit. They began to speak in different languages so that they could tell people from all over the world about Jesus.

The part of the story about being able to speak other languages is difficult for me to understand. I am terrible when it comes to learning and speaking languages other than English. Taking three years of German and three years of Spanish, and I barely remember how to say, "I forgot my book in the library" in either of those languages. Maybe some of you have the same challenge.

One of this week's UCC God is Still Speaking Devotionals gives readers a new way to think about speaking in other languages. Rev. Emily Heath writes, "Every year on Pentecost Sunday, I get the feeling that the church misses the point...I'm all for learning other languages, but this story isn't about taking Mandarin lessons or immersing ourselves in Finnish. Instead, it is about learning to speak in ways that are relevant to the people around me."¹

Rev. Heath goes on to tell a story that is all too familiar to me. So, I will tell it from my perspective. My niece, Heidi and her family attend a large non-denominational church. If you have ever attended a worship service in a church like this, you know the setting. Worship is often a large auditorium with a praise band, lots of praise music at the beginning, no altar, a male pastor-often somewhat on the young side-for sure younger than me who wears a casual shirt, and special effects lighting on the stage.

Last time we attended worship with Heidi, she pulls out her cell phone and her aunt

¹ Emily C. Heath, Learning New Languages
<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?hl=en&shva=1#search/Learning+/15c62ab75e670599>
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(that would be me) was appalled. She explains that the congregation is encouraged to check-in via Facebook when they arrive. This strategy is an evangelism tool meant to tell Heidi's Facebook friends (some of whom are unchurched) that she belongs to a cool church that uses up to date technology. (Up to date technology is very important to young people.) In fact, many large non-denominational churches have a dedicated staff person who focuses on technology.

In her online devotional, Heath goes on to say:

Our ways of communicating are changing every day. Facebook and Twitter and all the other online platforms are calling us into a Pentecost moment. Are we [the mainline church] going to wait for the people around us to walk into our doors to learn the language of church? Or are we going to learn to speak a new language and share our story with others?²

Your pastor uses her cell phone, email, and texting for pastoral care and to communicate with the congregation. These are ways of speaking a new language—a language which seems foreign to some but an evangelism tool for others.

My own take on speaking a new language is that when the Holy Spirit touches us, we learn to listen and respond differently. It is the familiar question “What Would Jesus Do or Say?”

The Holy Spirit is often symbolized as a what? White Dove. The medieval churches reenacted Pentecost by releasing white doves through little doors high in the cathedral ceilings. You knew, I could not get through a sermon during our present Emerge series without a reference to the ceiling.

While the doves were flying throughout the medieval church, the choir would make a whooshing sound like the rush of the mighty wind. And then, as a final touch, red rose petals would be dropped through the little doors in the ceiling. These openings in the church ceiling were called, “Holy Spirit holes.”

Diana Eck in her book entitled, *Encountering God*, writes:

We need these Holy Spirit holes. Our churches need these skyward openings to the wind rush of God . . . Holy Spirit holes would be perpetual reminders to both the prophetic and the Pentecostal movements in our churches that our knowledge of God is not complete. They would ceaselessly remind us that no image or icon, no petal or flame can tame God's Spirit.

² Emily C. Heath, *Learning New Languages*

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?hl=en&shva=1#search/Learning+/15c62ab75e670599>

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Do we at Trinity have “Holy Spirit holes” in our church? What if those holes in the ceiling that the workers are about to make represented places where the Holy Spirit can still get in at Trinity?

Those serving on our Fundraising Team have been answering questions which we are using to develop messages about why someone would want to give to our restoration efforts. Two of the questions include “How will this project impact Trinity? What will this allow you to do or be as a church?” One team member responded: *It will open our eyes to options and possibilities that may have never surfaced without being in this burdensome situation.*

Opening our eyes to options and possibilities...I'd say that's an opening for the Holy Spirit.

Pastor David Haley of Skokie Central United Methodist Church shared the following with his congregation on Pentecost Sunday several years ago:

I firmly believe that now, as then [on the first Pentecost Sunday], God has greater hopes for most congregations, congregations like our own, than to be secret Jesus Commemoration societies. I believe God is still creating the new community, even among old churches, empowering them by the power of the Holy Spirit, to become inviting, inclusive, worshiping and witnessing communities of faith.³

Trinity UCC is blest to be located right across the street from Manchester Elementary School and close to Main Street. We are surrounded by ministry opportunities, places where the Holy Spirit might come in and energize us. We would be wise to keep those Holy Spirit holes open and welcome the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The butterfly which is released from its cocoon, bursts forth to become something new. In its transformed body, the butterfly can soar and journey to new places. On this Pentecost Sunday, may we remember that the Holy Spirit accompanies us as we journey to new places in the world that so desperately needs people who know the power of transformation.

Amen

³ David Haley, Where are the Sprit Holes in Our Lives?

<https://skokiecentralchurch.wordpress.com/2008/05/11/2008-05-11-%E2%80%9Cwhere-are-the-holy-spirit-holes-in-our-lives%E2%80%9D-pentecost-sunday/>

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